Seeing

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Seeing

by DarkDreamsOfHannigram

Summary

For the Hannigram Reverse Bang 2019. A series of vignettes around the theme of metaphorical and emotional blindness.

Notes

Thank you to eatdirtverger for the beautiful art that served as inspiration for this fic!

“Your palate is way more refined than mine, Hannibal, I’m never going to be able to be anywhere near as proficient as you are. Besides, if I didn’t know better, I’d say you were trying to get me drunk,” Will said, perhaps more than half kidding.

Hannibal smiled, and opened his hands in a beg-your-forgiveness gesture. He had playfully suggested a small experiment when Will had joined him for dinner that evening. Although Graham wasn’t unsophisticated - both in reality and in Hannibal’s estimation, which was all that truly mattered anyway - he most definitely hadn’t had the same exposure to wine as Hannibal had. There was no comparison; Hannibal had more varied experiences across the globe by far, and he never held that against anyone. The capacity for curiosity and willingness to learn from him is what he valued most.

“I know I have more life experience in this area, Will, and certainly my genetic predisposition towards exceptional discernment of scents is going to give me an advantage-“

Will smirked at Hannibal’s characteristic, but always accurate, self-aggrandizement.

“-but it is certainly the case that one can learn to distinguish many different facets of wine, even without these personal gifts.”

This was the first time that they had eaten dinner alone together, and Will certainly didn’t want to be *rude* , so he decided to humor his host.

He stopped hunching his shoulders, and tried to adopt a more easy going sort of body language.

“Tell me what to do.”

“Right now, I would like you to focus more on the body of the wine, and anything it reminds you of. More subtle distinctions will come later. It’s a process of becoming familiar with certain aspects of what you are tasting, having those become second nature, and then becoming more able to discern more specific and subtler attributes, such as place of origin and then even vintage.”

Will looked skeptical, but watched with great interest while Hannibal poured small portions of three red wines.

“As you can see, they vary in color from lightest to darkest.”

“Do I drink the entire amount?” Will asked.

Hannibal smiled “What can I say. I don’t believe in the crude method of wastefulness that mass educational programming has led you to believe is acceptable,” he said, referring to the practice of spitting wine out once tasted. “And one must drink at least half a glass to get a proper taste. The first swallow is different from the second, and that is different from the final.”

Indicating that Will should try the lightest wine first, Will tasted it in three stages, accompanied by the swirling motion he'd seen others do, and the deep, meditative inhalation that seemed particular to Hannibal.

"There's a kind of berry taste, and I know from the color it is light bodied. Is it a Pinot Noir?"

"Not far off, Zweigelt."

"If I didn't know better, I would guess that you're purposely trying to trip me up," Will said, never having heard of that before.

Hannibal smiled imperceptibly.

Will tried the next, and guessed incorrectly yet again. Hannibal had assured him that he would not cajole him into trying too many, but Will was determined now to get at least one right.

"A little bit of plum, maybe? Is it a Sangiovese?"

"No, but again, not a bad guess - it is a Carménère grown in an Italian region."

Sensing Will's growing frustration - a state that he knew would eventually come, and one that he engineered to get to this place - Hannibal made a suggestion to Will that he was planning on all along, though he made it seem like a spontaneous one.

As they had been growing friendlier, Hannibal had begun to think (or perhaps *conceive* was a better word, as the ideas generated from themselves) of new ways to explore Graham's unique personality. This tasting of wine had enough of the veneer of the detached, the academic, that he felt it was safe to push into more intimate spaces without making Will shy away.

"Sometimes, the lessening of senses heightens others. This is not some magical transformation, but merely an elimination of distractions. For a sighted person, the effect is only temporary, and it does not work with everyone. But I believe it will prove helpful to you, at least long enough to get you past this. You should have an innate ability here, Will, but you are not relaxed enough."

"What are you suggesting," Will asked, trying not to sound too wary.

"As you have told me before, visual stimulation can be overwhelming for you. I propose to eliminate it, however temporarily."

"You...want me to wear a blindfold?" Will asked, somewhat startled. Hannibal's methods were at times unconventional, but this seemed different. But his trust in this man had grown since their icy first meeting by quite a lot, and he was willing to try. He could only admit to himself that he was becoming annoyed that he seemed to be failing at a task Hannibal found so simple.

Will made a gesture of acquiescence, and Hannibal went to the kitchen. He came back with a clean dish towel, folded lengthwise. Will thought to himself that the thing probably cost more

than everything he had on.

“What should I do,” he asked.

Hannibal answered, “Sit forward a little. Just keep a natural and easy position, as if you are about to taste.”

Will complied, and Hannibal went behind him, grazing his cheek ever so gently as he tied the cloth firmly but comfortably around his eyes.

“Can you see anything, Will”?

“No.”

“No cheating,” Hannibal chided, and Will had to permit himself to smile. He found himself wanting to please this man, and to show he was open-minded.

Hannibal handed Will the glass, and watched with his lips ever so slightly parted as Will tasted. With Will blindfolded, Hannibal could allow himself to drink in another way, taking in the sight of the man before him slowly savoring the dark red liquid, that stained his lips. He tried not to audibly exhale.

“It’s very...dark...even though I saw it before, even if I hadn’t, I would know that.”

He took a second sip, inhaling deeply this time.

“It’s rich, barely tastes of fruit at all. Dry. Almost...animalistic?”

“Yes, Will. You’re very close now.”

One last sip, which Hannibal watched intently.

“Is it Mourvèdre?”

“It is indeed,” Hannibal replied. “I am most impressed.”

Will smiled, with those stained lips that Hannibal’s gaze lingered over one last time - for now. He knew he would see them again this way, and would be able to look much less surreptitiously one day soon.

He took the glass from Will’s hand, and set it down before slowly and deliberately taking off the makeshift blindfold. He noted to himself that the next time he did this, for whatever reason it may occur in the future, it would be a more appropriate fabric. *Silk* , he thought.

Will sat back in his chair, becoming accustomed to seeing again.

“It’s beginning to irritate me that you’re becoming so good at understanding how my mind works. Certainly better than I do,” Will said.

“It is easier to turn one’s gaze on another than one’s self.”

“It’s something more than that, don’t start with the false modesty now. Still. It’s useful to know that I can understand things somewhat how you do,” Will replied, referring on the surface to the wine, but between them passed the understanding that it was about far more than that.

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Another way that Hannibal wanted to try to get Will to be able to perceive more clearly was to watch him at a crime scene. Jack Crawford was always happy to have another set of eyes in the field, especially ones as astute as Dr. Lecter’s. He’d posed the suggestion as a way to more fully understand what Will went through in these situations. But in truth, it served his own agenda, as did all of his actions.

Three murders had occurred in as many months. They had all been set up to look like accidents; the first, a bathtub drowning, the second, a fall, and this one, the third, a drug overdose. However, the biographical details of each were similar enough that a second look had been taken, and the death investigations were reclassified as homicides. The primary thing found to link them all together is that they were all investment managers, and secretly defrauding their clients.

Will and Hannibal arrived together, and all the rest of the investigators were already in attendance. The man’s apartment was in the most expensive building downtown, which should have raised red flags, had anyone been looking for them. His official income never would have paid for it.

Hannibal looked around at the furnishings, the art. In his estimation, this was someone with little taste, who wished to appear that he had it. This wasn’t something that one could do, of course; taste could not be bought.

He traced the back of a chair with the tip of a finger. *Imitation leather,* he thought with disgust. Then he noticed that Will was looking at him, that processing, calculating look which Hannibal had come to know denoted him trying to make some connection in his mind. He stopped touching the chair, and Will shook himself out of his reverie, then refocused on the victim and his killer.

“Do you think he was someone who deserved to die? Who was rude?”

“We can each make our own judgments about that, Will, but currently it is your opinion that matters most.”

Will set his jaw in mild annoyance. Hannibal was right, of course - the redirection to his own way of seeing was needed. But this sort of victim was someone Hannibal would have more insight on. This was about conspicuous consumption, which Hannibal was far more acquainted with than him. Will could easily tell, though, that there was a lack of taste here.

He picked up Hannibal's feelings on the subject, but he knew enough about it on his own. Their earlier exercise with the wine certainly proved his true capabilities.

Will walked around the apartment. There were no obvious signs of the homicide, only the usual kinds of things that might have been disrupted if someone were having an overdose. There were a few chairs knocked over, a couple of broken vases. But a crime scene investigator would not necessarily see it as suspicious; one person falling down could've done it, and it didn't have to be the result of a fight. The thing that really tipped it off was the vomit, and Will had learned that the victim was known to occasionally do injectable drugs of many types. Of course, the body had already been taken from the scene and autopsied, but the apartment hadn't been cleaned. There were things in disarray, and bodily fluids. This made things more difficult for Will, but not impossible - he could still reconstruct it in his mind even absent the corpse.

Hannibal could tell that Will was starting to sink into himself and extend his thoughts around the room, and into the past. He ushered the rest of the team out, so Will could be free of distractions.

Will closed his eyes, and the golden sweep of light scattered his own consciousness, and merged it with that of the killer's.

I enter at night, after he has finally fallen asleep. I know his patterns. I've watched and followed him for some time now. This has to look like the culmination of the way he lived his life. This is my design.

In his mind, Will saw the killer, a man, enter by hacking into the electronic locking system. He walks swiftly but carefully into the bedroom, where the victim is lying on his back, snoring loudly. The killer smiles; *this will be easy.*

He is sleeping in his underwear, which is designer and expensive, but it fits him poorly. The killer regards him with distaste, and Will feels it as if it is his own. He goes to the bedside, stepping over discarded clothing and a few champagne bottles. He places a chloroform-soaked pad over the man's mouth and nose until the snoring stops. Not too much; he wants him to wake eventually.

When the man is lightly unconscious, he goes to lay in wait in the living room. After an hour or so, just as the chloroform would be starting to wear off, the killer knocks over a vase onto the stone floor. The noise is sharp and very loud; the man wakes up and stumbles into the room, the morning light only beginning to appear. He trips over the couch, and falls, hitting his head on the coffee table, going unconscious yet again.

This is when I give you something for the pain, Will thought as the killer's mind merges with his own. He injects the man with heroin, overdosing him. He wakes only briefly to vomit, which he aspirates, and dies. The crime scene investigators would assume he took the drug, then fell, then choked. They would have no way of knowing that the fall came first.

Characteristically, Will came out of the visualization feeling horrified. Uncharacteristically, Hannibal was right there to observe it. He'd been watching Will the whole time, in utter fascination, his lips slightly parted. He could observe every detail of the emotions Will

experienced, just by looking at his face. Of greatest interest to Hannibal was how much he seemed to express *pleasure* at so much of what he was seeing. Normally, Will carried a measurable amount of stress and fatigue on his face; not so when he was deep in his empathy. He looked content, as if all of that melted away. Of course, there was a price to pay for this unusual form of therapy - when his personality completely reasserted itself, the anxiety and exhaustion returned double, and combined with an unabiding sickness.

Hannibal regained his usual detached visage, as he watched Will wipe his forehead, and rub his temples.

“What did you see?”

Will described how he saw the murder happen. He couldn’t help include how it made him feel to see it.

“It’s horrifying to watch someone die, to do nothing to stop it.”

“Even if that person may deserve it?” Hannibal countered.

“I don’t think drug addiction warrants a death sentence.”

“Do you think he was an addict?”

Will considered this for a moment. “I don’t think the killer saw him that way. He saw him as overindulgent, and the drug use was just another facet of that, not the cause of his other lifestyle issues.”

“Beyond the excess, the man fueled it with money stolen from those he took advantage of. The killer put a stop to it. Should it not feel justified? Even righteous?”

“I feel like we should be having this conversation in your office, not out here.”

Even though Hannibal didn’t kill him, he would have. He was almost envious he didn’t get the opportunity himself. Hannibal didn’t trust his monetary holdings to investment managers, for this very reason; in addition to the fickle fortunes of world markets, there was always the fact of *greed* . No - he entrusted his wealth to the diversification that multiple identities could achieve, lands and holdings throughout the world that he could access even if whole civilizations fell.

But this man, like the others that were killed, certainly would have ended up on Hannibal’s dinner table if he had been in a position to cheat him. Like so many others in the last several years, this man had misused the funds that were entrusted to him. Rude on its face, of course, but this man had defrauded charities and the elderly, not just the *nouveau riche* . Others besides him had done it on a much larger scale, and had been caught, but this victim did not get caught, at least not by official systems of justice. He had done it on a small enough scale to enrich himself, but avoid detection.

Until now, of course. Someone had figured out his scheme, and now he was dead. As this was the third body that had been found dispatched in this manner, it was this find that finally

established enough of a pattern for the forensic accountants to look into all three victims' financials, and discover the truth.

Will continued to look like his energy had been sapped, and Hannibal thought this was not a proper state of affairs. To him, there was no reason for Will to find this a negative experience; in fact, he wanted Will to feel *good* about it.

"I believe it would be best to talk about this now, Will, while the experience is still so fresh in your mind. Does that not seem logical?"

Will nodded in acquiescence, seeing the truth of it, despite not wanting to further aggravate the rawness of his feelings.

"You must tap into your emotions," Hannibal continued softly, as a rescuer would speak to a wounded animal he wished to provide assistance. Not to scare him, not to cause further injury. To soothe. "I believe you have more experience contending with those who kill the innocent, not the guilty. Try to think of the destruction that this killer prevented."

Will looked uneasy. "A moral killer? Who seeks to mete out his own justice? Society would collapse if we relied on that."

"Perhaps so," Hannibal said, smiling gently. "But I am concerned more about the effects on you, Will, not on social institutions. If you imagine this as righteous it may be easier for you."

Will had to concede that his emotional state probably wouldn't harm the fabric of society. "OK. What should I do?"

"You are sometimes blind to your feelings, or the depth of them. There is so much of others that invades your psyche, that you can be unaware of your true self. I see that there is so much more to you than you admit. It is not only that you conceal it from others, but also from yourself. Why do you think this is so?'

Will looked down, not wanting to admit to Hannibal what he knew to be true while looking him in the eye.

"I'm afraid I might enjoy it. I have to shut off the perception, the feelings and the interpretation, because I can't shut off the seeing."

Hannibal put his hand on Will's upper arm after a few moments, and the gesture made Will look up at last. Something passed between them then, a sense of understanding that made them both feel like they were the only people alive on the planet.

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Hannibal poured Will a glass of wine. He was dressed uncharacteristically casually for his office, but as Will wasn't formally a patient, he didn't feel the need to maintain the distance between them that his usual copious layers helped provide.

They were together in his office, sitting apart. Hannibal made sure their chairs were closer together than he usually arranged them with his clients. Will had so many defenses, he didn't want to add physical distance as another.

It was just past sunset, and long, low light still filtered through the tall curtains. He paused for a moment to admire how the soft glow illuminated Will's hair, almost like a halo.

The wine was a particularly rare and sophisticated one. Will had progressed far in his ability to discern things about vintages, and although Hannibal did not plan on quizzing him tonight, he felt that Will would appreciate its subtlety. The label on the bottle had an artistic rendering of a man, in Regency dress, with both hands covering his eyes. At the bottom was written the name, "Ne vois pas de mal."

"Strange name for a wine," Will remarked

"'See no evil'. A direct way of avoidance, such as how you avoid seeing so directly. Think of it as a metaphor for your displeasure at eye contact."

"Do you think I am metaphorically blind?"

"A complicated question, one that deserves exploration. I will try to ask it in a different way - What did you think I thought of you the first time I saw you?"

"You're asking me to look inward," Will replied.

"Not necessarily. I am asking you to define your perception, at a particular moment in time, of me."

Will thought for a moment. "A subject. I felt like a bug under a microscope, because you wanted to dissect me."

Hannibal smiled in obvious mirth. "While I have always found you fascinating, Will, even at the start I had no desire to dismember you. Why do you think I wanted to take you apart?"

Another pause. "Because you do that to everyone. Get at the gears of what makes them tick. I imagine you do a relatively good job of putting them together again, or else you wouldn't have such a successful practice."

"True," Hannibal conceded. "But I wanted your friendship, not your obligation as a patient. You were never just anyone to me. Try again."

Will stared up at the ceiling for a moment. "I keep thinking of you in a professional sense. That was the level I was operating on that day. I was sucked into the case. I didn't see you, at least consciously. I found you distracting."

“Why don’t you think about how you felt about me? Although you certainly disliked me outwardly, your mirroring abilities must have responded in some way.”

Will ran his fingers through his hair, and Hannibal’s eyes lingered on them, as he momentarily wondered about the softness of the curls.

“I thought you were overly self confident. At first I thought it was because you were from old money, or something. But then I realized you weren’t all surface and no substance. You really were good. And that annoyed me. But I suppose I was partly flattered that you took an interest in me. I’m not used to people who are like you doing that. Part of me liked it. That’s probably why I showed such ‘dislike,’ as you put it. I was irritated at myself too.”

“Then what would be the rational conclusion? If I didn’t think of you as a patient, and I wanted to go beyond a mere professional arrangement…?”

“Friendship would make the most sense, but…” Will trailed off. He knew that wasn’t right either. Then it struck him. Hannibal was pleased, and responded by adopting a more relaxed posture. He wanted to encourage Will to keep going down this road, but gently. The moment was key.

Will continued. “I’ve seen how you act with those who you consider friends. You are polite and congenial, even generous, but you keep them at arm’s length. You don’t let them in. You don’t try to understand them, at least not at the level you’ve tried to understand me. But it’s more than finding me intriguing.”

“I see some of my own qualities in you, and some that exceed my own. But even that does not explain it, and you can see that, at least now.”

Hannibal stood, and walked to the low couch along the wall. Will thought by himself for a minute before joining him. He still found it hard to look directly at Hannibal, preferring instead to divert his gaze. But at last, he decided that he couldn’t avoid it after all. Hannibal’s expression was open, receptive.

“You’re letting me come to you,” Will said.

“I am,” Hannibal affirmed. He was surprised when Will touched his hand.

“You’re afraid if you told me, instead of me figuring it out for myself, I’d run. Or break.”

“I was.”

Will shifted subtly closer, and Hannibal could feel his breath now. It pricked up the hairs on the back of his neck, the closest he could get to the sensation of nervousness. He enjoyed it immensely.

“What would you have done if I’d been spooked?” Will asked.

Hannibal smiled, broadly this time. “I wouldn’t think you’d enjoy being compared to a horse anymore than you’d favor being likened to china.”

Will smiled back. ‘You’re avoiding the question.”

This time, Hannibal dropped his gaze. “I would have waited, reestablished trust, and tried again. I don’t think I’d have ever stopped trying, no matter what happened, or how long it took.”

Will reached up, and touched Hannibal’s jaw, so he’d look at him again. He found that he didn’t want Hannibal to stop looking, to stop *seeing* him. Instead of wanting to hide from his gaze, he found that he wanted Hannibal to do more than just look at him.

“You’re letting me come to you,” Will repeated, and at last, he did.

They were practically doing so already, being so close in proximity to one another, so leaning in for a kiss was barely a full step further, but it was at the same time a crossing of a threshold. An irrevocable one. There was no going back. Will did it anyway.

For Hannibal, time and thought ceased. He didn’t have to try to commit the moment to his memory palace. He simply savored it. After Will didn’t immediately pull away, Hannibal leaned into the act, breathing Will in. He slid his hand - the one Will wasn’t holding - tentatively up his back, which made Will lean in too. Hannibal found Will’s free hand on the back of his neck, which made him falter, taking a sharp breath in, but then he redoubled the intensity of the kiss. Despite the new and heightened experience, Hannibal relaxed.

For Will, his senses deepened. He both felt in his body, and saw in his mind. It was similar to experiencing the acts and feelings of one of the many killers whose eyes he’d looked through, but it was more like an experience of himself, but removed.

Normally when this happened, when he came out of it, he was drained; but he knew this would energize him instead. He could feel what effect his hand on Hannibal’s neck was having. He wanted to do more of that. Hannibal was so controlled in his daily life, the thought of having the power to break through that, to see what lay beneath the discipline, was intoxicating.

They both broke the kiss at the same time, another indication of their connection. Hannibal was the first to speak.

“I don’t think I was expecting that. At least not so easily.”

“It’s true that things between us haven’t always clicked, but they have been lately,” Will replied.

It was Hannibal’s turn to stroke Will’s jawline. Will closed his eyes, and tilted his head into the contact. It brought him right back to where he was a moment ago, when he was kissing Hannibal, but it was almost as if he was experiencing what Hannibal did when he had touched him first.

“Surely you had to have become aware of my feelings for you at some point.”

“I certainly would have been blind to not notice the way you look at me sometimes,” Will said, almost coyly.

Hannibal arched an eyebrow in minute surprise. “If you noticed, and you didn’t consciously know how I felt, what did you think about this observation?”

Will smiled and leaned in conspiratorially. “If I’m being honest, I enjoyed it. That kind of attention, from you? You don’t look at anyone else like that. But sometimes I don’t reflect on myself. I’m probably afraid it’s selfish or something.”

“You spend too much time in other people’s heads, Will. I think you deserve to be able to enjoy your own, at least occasionally,” Hannibal chided.

“I think you are on the way to helping me with that.”

“I’d like to help more,” Hannibal said, and kissed him again, this time far less tentatively. He leaned Will back at the same time, putting his weight onto Will’s hips.

Will gasped into his mouth, which was stifled by a small bite on his lower lip. He pushed back with his own weight, and tangled his fingers into Hannibal’s hair. He relished disturbing its perfection.

He was rewarded with a gasp of Hannibal’s. Will tightened his grip, and felt the reaction in Hannibal’s body. They finally broke the kiss, both breathless. Will hadn’t let go, however.

“Don’t stop,” Hannibal managed to say between intakes of breath. Will studied his face carefully as he loosened, tightened, loosened his fingers. Finally he let go, and Hannibal near-collapsed against him.

“I wouldn’t have expected that,” Will murmured into his ear, before nipping it.

Hannibal hissed appreciatively. Will began to understand some new things about this man, and decided to take it a step further by putting his hand over Hannibal’s throat and giving the slightest squeeze. Hannibal became limp in his embrace, inviting Will to do with him as he pleased. Will wasn’t going to take it further than this right away, but it was definitely important knowledge he’d use at another time.

They both sat up at this, knowing they’d reached some kind of limit for the time being. Hannibal slid his hand slowly up Will’s thigh as his mind tumbled in on itself at all the possibilities that lay ahead. Will reacted to this much like he had when the fingers had pressed into his neck; he elicited a delicate, delicious shudder from the man as he stopped just short of the tightness in the fabric around his crotch.

They’d both learned a great deal about each other that night. Hannibal liked extreme experiences, and Will enjoyed the little tastes of anticipation. To both of them, in retrospect, these things should have been clear. Nonetheless, the pleasure of discovery was satisfying for each in their own ways.

“I suppose the obvious question is where do we go from here?” Will asked, a trace of his former shyness and reticence remaining.

Hannibal kissed him, not deeply or ferociously this time, but gently.

“Quite far, I should hope,” he responded with both humor and sincerity.

Will smiled broadly and openly, the kind of smile usually reserved for his home, surrounded by the familiar comfort of his dogs.

“I think I can see that happening.”

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